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MOVEMENTS OF NEGRO POPULATION AS SHOWN BY CENSUS OF 1910

When in 1790 the first census was taken, the negroes constituted 19.3 per cent or nearly one fifth of the entire population. They then formed a larger proportion of the inhabitants of the country as a whole than they now do of Maryland or of Texas.

According to the census of 1910, only 10.7 per cent of the American people have African blood in their veins. This percentage is a little smaller than it is in Kentucky and a little larger than in Oklahoma. The number of whites has increased more rapidly than that of the blacks during practically all of the one hundred and twenty years which have separated the first administration of Washington from that of Taft. Upon the face of the census returns there were two decades when the reverse was true. Between 1800 and 1810 the Napoleonic wars were at their height; European immigration into this country was trifling. During four fifths of the decade the slave trade was still legal. Every one knew that after 1808 it would be forbidden. It was, as a consequence, abnormally active in the years immediately preceding. In 1810 it was found that while the white population had increased 36.1 per cent, the negro increase had been a trifle greater, or 37.5 per cent. Both these percentages were very large. The increase of the whites was due almost altogether to the excess of births over deaths.

The only other census which seemed to show that the negro population was growing at a more rapid rate than the white was that of 1880, according to which it was 34.9 per cent greater than ten years before. Immigration of negroes had been considerable. The whites increased nearly 30 per cent; and European immigrants were numerous. If reliable, the importance of these census statements could hardly be exaggerated. For if the rate of natural increase among the negroes had, in the decade, been from 50 to 75 per cent greater than among the whites, there was reason to fear that the United States would ultimately cease to

be a white man's country, in the numerical sense of that term, at least; and that the southern states would soon have an overwhelming preponderance of African blood. There were not a few speeches made and not a few articles written to show that emancipation was producing much the same result in the Gulf States that it had in the British West Indies. Most of the talking and writing was done by white men; they were alarmed. The few negroes who discussed the subject were inclined, not unnaturally, to be a trifle boastful in their predictions.

After the census of 1890 had been taken, it was found that hopes and fears were equally idle. Political conditions in the South had, in 1870, prevented a full count of the people of either race. And since society was most disorganized in sections where the negroes were most numerous, census takers overlooked more negroes than whites. According to the census of 1890, the rate of negro increase in the decade preceding, instead of being greater than that of the whites as the former census had appeared to show, had been only one half so great. It was officially reported to have been 13.5 per cent as against 27.7 per cent for the whites.

The wind of prophecy chopped round. Expert statisticians, in learned and laborious monographs, proved to their own satisfaction that before long the negro population would actually decrease. Some of those who had been intimately connected with the taking of the census of 1890 doubted whether it was sufficiently accurate to form a reliable basis for so far-reaching a conclusion. When the results of the enumeration of 1900 were made public it appeared that there were 18 per cent more negroes in the country than had been returned in 1890. In neither decade had there been any appreciable negro emigration or immigration. It was not easy to understand how it was possible that the negro rate of increase should fluctuate so violently and unaccountably. There were no conditions known to exist which would have led to so rapid an advance in the rate of natural increase. The truth was that in 1890 census taking had been badly done, especially in the South. In all probability, the rate of negro increase between 1880 and 1890 was about 16 per cent rather than 13.5; and between 1890 and 1900, under 15 per cent rather than 18 per cent as reported.

This restatement of a twice-told story has been made with a purpose. If the census of 1910 was accurately taken, there is again a sudden drop in the rate of negro increase. According to

the official figures it fell to 11.2 per cent. It may well be so. If it is, the fact may be very significant. No one knows that it is not so. In the light of past experience one may hesitate to build too confidently upon it. There is no sure way of checking up its accuracy. Few or none of the states in which the negroes are relatively numerous have any general and efficient system of registering either births or deaths.

Some light may, perhaps, be gotten by noting the relative proportion of young negro children to the total negro population as returned at different census periods. Such a comparison seems to show that the birth-rate among persons of African descent is falling, though the diminution in the last decade does not appear to have been great. Moreover, an examination of the tables of age distributions at the different enumerations seems to indicate that when a census has been badly taken, an undue proportion of those omitted have been very young children. It may well be that professional statisticians can find in the census volumes data which will enable them to demonstrate that the negro increase as there stated is accurate, or the reverse. I have not been able to do the one or the other. This much may be safely ventured. It is not probable that the negro rate of increase was much above 14 per cent, or say 3 per cent more than the census says it was. If it was so great, the number of negroes omitted could not have much exceeded a quarter of a million. Even if the census returns were inaccurate to that extent, certain very important results to which they point would be unaffected. It would still remain true that in the country as a whole the whites are increasing relatively faster than the blacks, and that their absolute increase is many times as great.

The really vital question with reference to the increase and distribution of the negro inhabitants has always been whether there is any considerable portion of the country in which they are likely ever to be numerically preponderant to any considerable degree. In only one section has such a possibility ever seemed to exist. The six contiguous states, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, have an area of over 287,000 square miles, which is one third greater than that of either France or Germany. Had slavery continued, it is at least probable that the majority, and perhaps a considerable majority, of the human beings who would now be living in this

great and fertile section of the country would be negroes or persons with more or less negro blood.

In the half century preceding the Civil War, the process of Africanization went steadily on. When the third census was taken, in 1810, out of every thousand residents of this portion of the country 532 were white. It is true that Florida had not then been annexed and its few inhabitants were not included in the census figures. Had they been, no appreciable change in the relative proportion of the races would have resulted. This white majority of 64 in every thousand decreased decade after decade. When at the Charleston convention the Democratic party split and thereby made Republican success in the electoral college probable if not certain, there were in the six states in question only 504 whites to every 496 blacks, a white majority of but eight to the thousand. The abolition of slavery did not at once reverse the tendency. In 1870 for the first time the census showed a negro majority. In 1880 it was still larger, there being then 520 blacks to every 480 whites. Since then the movement has been in the opposite direction. In 1890 there were 506 negroes in every thousand. In 1900, for the first time since 1860, there was again a white majority. It was very small—only 4,000 out of a total population of nearly 9,000,000. In the last decade the whites have gained with great rapidity. They now have a majority of more than half a million. Out of every thousand inhabitants, 527 are white and only 473 are black. The relative proportion of the races in these states is now about what it was at the close of the second war with Great Britain. Of course, if there was in 1910 an under-enumeration of negroes, the greater portion of the omissions were probably in these states. And if so, it would nevertheless be true that the whites had in the decade added to their total 300,000 more than the blacks.

All possibility that there will ever be a negro population in this section of the country has apparently passed forever. Only two of the six, South Carolina and Mississippi, now have negro majorities. If the whites are gaining on the blacks as fast as the last census indicates, within twenty years there should be a white majority in South Carolina, and before many decades in Mississippi as well. If the census be somewhat inaccurate, a longer period may elapse before that result is attained. That sooner or later it will be, seems highly probable.

It is possible that every state in the South may come to have

a white majority, while at the same time the negro preponderance in certain sections of them increases. Such would be the case if the white population grew rapidly in those counties in which the whites are already in the majority, or in those in which the negro majority is but small, while the already small white population of the overwhelmingly negro counties either decreased or increased but slowly.

In 1900 there were 19 counties¹ in each of which the negroes were at least five times as numerous as the whites and in which it was possible to compare the race distribution of the population with that which existed in the same areas twenty years before. Between 1880 and 1890 the white population had increased from a little less than 44,000 to a little more than 47,000, while the negro population had grown from 263,000 to 364,000. These counties were apparently becoming blacker and blacker all the time. In 1880, out of every thousand inhabitants 143 were white. By 1900 this proportion had fallen to 115 in every thousand. Between 1900 and 1910, however, it rose to 134. This fact may not be very significant, for if there had been any considerable number of negroes overlooked by the census takers a very large proportion of such cases would in all probability have been in these very counties.

The really important revelation of the census of 1910 is that no negro preponderance is so great as in itself to prevent an increase of the white population, either by leading to the emigration of white residents or by preventing the immigration of whites from other places. In these blackest of black counties,² the whites, during the last decade, have increased 27 per cent, the negroes but 7 per cent. In 15 of the 19 counties there was an actual increase in the white population—a decrease in only four. It is not likely that census enumerators could have returned blacks as whites in any appreciable number.

If the same tendencies which apparently were at work during the decade between 1900 and 1910 shall continue in full force for the next half century, there will be few counties in the United States in which the negroes will greatly, if at all, outnumber the whites. Some considerable progress in turning black into white

¹ Beaufort, South Carolina; Lee, Georgia; Green and Lowndes, Alabama; Bolivar, Coahoma, Issaquena, Leflore, Noxubee, Sharkey, Tunica, and Washington, Mississippi; Concordia, East Carroll, Madison, Tensas and West Feliciana, Louisiana; Chicot and Crittenden, Arkansas.

² The same enumerated in Note 1.

counties has been made in the last ten years. In 1900 there were 287 counties with negro majorities. There were such counties in Maryland and in every one of the eleven states which made up the Southern Confederacy. Between the two census periods four new negro counties have been created by dividing some of those which existed ten years ago. There were in 1910 only 263 counties with negro majorities. Deducting the four new counties, which of course added nothing to the area of the black belts, there was during the ten years a net loss to those belts of 28 counties. In the aggregate, the area of these 28 doubtless exceeded that of the state of Maryland. One census period is, of course, too short a time upon which to base confident predictions. It can, however, be asserted that the census of 1910 seems very conclusively to show that the whites are almost everywhere increasing more rapidly than the blacks, and that the negro population is tending toward dispersion throughout the country rather than toward segregation in particular portions of it.

Negro population in the last decade increased more rapidly than white in only two of the old slave states having any considerable negro population, Arkansas and Oklahoma. There was such an increase in West Virginia, but the negro population of that state is still relatively very small and it even now contains relatively fewer negroes than it did before the war. Those who have come in during the last few years have been brought in to work in its mines. The dispersion of the negro population is evidenced by the fact that in the last decade their numbers in the old free states have increased 22.8 per cent; that is to say, their rate of increase has there been twice as great as their average rate of increase for the country as a whole. It is probable that the excess of births over deaths among the Northern negroes is less than among the Southern. Obviously, there has been a considerable movement of negroes, during the decade, northward across the Mason and Dixon Line and the Ohio River. Yet in the North as a whole the negroes do not even yet number one in every fifty of the inhabitants.

The question of whether the races are amalgamating is of great importance. Not a little of our legislation and many of our social restrictions rest upon the fear that there is danger of such race admixture. It is generally believed that the process is going on now much less rapidly than it once did. In 1850, 1860, 1870, 1890, and 1910, the census authorities attempted to ascertain the pro-

portion of mulattoes among the entire negro population. In 1850 that proportion was returned as 11.2 per cent; in 1860 as 13.2 per cent; in 1870 as 12 per cent; in 1890 as 15.2 per cent; and in 1900 as 20.9 per cent. Mulatto, within the census definition, includes every one of mixed blood, no matter in what proportion. Mulattoes and negroes, of course, freely intermarry. The census figures may, therefore, be right without contradicting the popular impression. They would, however, tend to negative the current idea that the rate of natural increase among mixed bloods is small.

Slave labor could be employed to better advantage in the cultivation of staples than in any other line of industry extensively carried on in the South before the war. While slavery existed, therefore, there was a tendency toward concentration of the negro population in those portions of each state in which the raising of tobacco, indigo, rice, cotton, or sugar was most largely engaged in. As a consequence, when slavery was abolished and for some time thereafter, the counties in which the negroes were in a majority were not sprinkled in checkerboard fashion over the entire surface of the southern states, but were grouped almost exclusively in four so-called black belts, three of them extensive and one smaller.³ These belts were of irregular outline. They might surround one or more counties in which there was a white majority. A tongue of white counties might project into a mass of black counties or vice versa, but with few and insignificant exceptions every county which had a black majority touched on at least one other county.

The first negro slaves brought into the English-speaking colonies of continental America came to Virginia when Virginia was almost exclusively engaged in the production of tobacco. The northernmost of the black belts may be fairly described as the tobacco belt, although in some of its southern counties cotton is also raised. For eighty years this belt has been diminishing in area. In 1830 it included, in Maryland, the three Eastern Shore counties of Kent, Queen Anne, and Talbot, and all of the five Western Shore counties south of the Patapsco; in Virginia, nearly all the counties east of the Blue Ridge; and some in North Carolina. In that year it covered an area of over 27,000 square miles divided into some 70 counties. It was more than twice as extensive as the entire state of Maryland. Now it includes only forty-

³ They may be called the tobacco, the Eastern cotton, the Mississippi, and the Texas belts.

four counties and covers an area of less than 18,000 square miles. It is becoming more and more irregular in outline. Wherever industrial centers are developing or cities are gaining in population, the whites are in the majority or apparently soon will be. Its northern boundary has been pushed southward. Charles (Md.) is the only county north of the Potomac which now has a negro majority.

It is true that there are four counties included in the black belt under discussion which in 1830 had white majorities, but they all lie on its southern edge. Three of them are in North Carolina;⁴ the other one is Princess Anne, the extreme southeast county of Virginia. In that section of the state, outside of Norfolk, there has been for some reason a tendency to a relative increase of the negro population. In the last decade the negroes have relatively decreased in every county in Maryland, and in eighty-eight out of the hundred counties of Virginia. Calvert County, Maryland, six Virginia⁵ and three North Carolina counties⁶ have changed from negro to white majorities. Only two, one in Virginia south of the James,⁷ and one in northeastern North Carolina,⁸ which were white in 1900 are now black, so that in the last ten years the tobacco belt has suffered a net loss of eight counties.

In the cotton section there have been two great black belts. One extended from southern North Carolina to eastern Mississippi. The first negroes that came into that belt were not brought into it to cultivate cotton. In the first half of the eighteenth century rice and indigo were the staple products of South Carolina and Georgia. Indigo cultivation has long since ceased. The production of rice on a large scale has been transferred from South Carolina and Georgia to Louisiana. In 1900 this more eastern of the cotton black belts included a county or two in southern North Carolina, almost all of South Carolina, nearly all of central Georgia, together with the coast sections of the southern portions of that state and the larger part of its southwestern area. The central interior counties of southern Georgia remained predominantly white; they constituted the Cracker country. The cotton counties of Florida may be said to have formed a part of

⁴ Pasquotank, Edgecombe, Caswell.

⁵ Buckingham, Gloucester, James City, Louisa, Norfolk (including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth), and York.

⁶ Granville, Pitt, and Washington.

⁷ Isle of Wight.

⁸ Perquimans.

this belt, although some of them were separated from it by a narrow strip of white territory. During the last decade the territorial extent of the eastern portion of this belt has remained unaltered.

It is true that in South Carolina, if the census may be relied on, one of the most striking changes of the ten years, if not the most striking, has taken place. In that state the negroes have increased but 6.8 per cent against a white increase of 21.8 per cent. This movement is very different from that which, for many years before the war, was going on. In 1800 there was a white majority of nearly 50,000 in South Carolina. By 1820 there was a negro majority of almost 30,000, which by 1860 had increased to 120,000. Emancipation did not stop the movement. The absolute negro majority continued to increase until 1890, when it reached a maximum of nearly 227,000. In 1900 it remained substantially unchanged, but in 1910 it fell to 156,000. In the last decade the absolute increase in the white population has been many thousands more than the entire increase of white inhabitants between 1800 and 1860. It has been more than twice as great as the absolute negro increase during the last ten years, and relatively more than three times as great. It has so happened, however, that no county in South Carolina which had a black majority in 1900 now has a white.

It is rather curious that, while in North Carolina on the north the negro rate of increase has been 11.7 per cent, and in Georgia on the west, 13.7 per cent, in South Carolina it has been only 6.8 per cent. In Georgia there has been some shifting back and forth of counties. Two white counties have become negro,⁹ five negro counties white,¹⁰ and a new negro county¹¹ has been created. The more significant changes have been that Bibb County containing Macon, and Muscogee County with Columbus, although in the black belt, now have white majorities. A similar situation has developed in Norfolk County, Virginia, in Duval County, Florida, in which Jacksonville is situated, and in Shelby County, Tennessee, of which Memphis forms a part. Indeed, in the South during the last decade the whites have gained faster than the blacks in almost all the larger cities. Before 1900 there was some tendency in the opposite direction. There were in 1910 nine cities

⁹ Elbert and Newton.

¹⁰ Bibb, Bryan, Muscogee, Oconee, and Taylor.

¹¹ Crisp.

in the South Atlantic and South Central sections of the country with a population of upwards of a hundred thousand each.¹² In every one of them the whites, during the decade, increased more rapidly than the negroes. In the preceding decade, in five¹³ of them the negro rate of increase was larger than that of the whites.

Returning to the analysis of the changes in the easternmost of the great cotton belts, we find that in Florida five¹⁴ counties which were negro in 1900 are now white and three¹⁵ then white are now negro. It so happens that the changes have cut off five¹⁶ of the negro counties of the state from the black belt proper. In Alabama the whites have increased two and a third times as fast as the blacks; and the one negro county which, in 1900, did not geographically form part of the black belt—Talladega—has now a white majority. In Mississippi there has been no change in the boundaries of the eastern black belt. The hill country of central Mississippi running across the state from north to south has always separated the eastern cotton black belt from that of the Mississippi Valley and its tributaries. The latter belt had its origin while the French were still in control of Louisiana and when the negroes were doubtless brought in to work on the sugar plantations. As early as 1810, if not before, there were more negroes than whites in Louisiana. At that time it was the only subdivision of the United States in which there was a negro majority. The negro population gradually spread up both sides of the Mississippi River and along the Red River into Texas. To some extent it also followed the Arkansas.

During the last twenty years the whites of Louisiana have been gaining very rapidly upon the blacks. The state has now a white population twice as great as it had thirty years ago, while the negro increase in that time has been less than 50 per cent. In 1910 there were six¹⁷ fewer negro parishes in Louisiana than there were in 1900. It is no longer possible to voyage from the mouth of the Mississippi to Memphis without ever getting out of sight of a negro parish or county. The continuity of the Red River black belt has been broken. The negro parishes up towards the Texas

¹² Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Louisville, Nashville, Memphis, Atlanta, Birmingham, and New Orleans.

¹³ Baltimore, Louisville, Memphis, Birmingham, and New Orleans.

¹⁴ Columbia, Duval, Jackson, Liberty, and Wakulla.

¹⁵ Citrus, Hernando, and Putnam.

¹⁶ Alachua, Putnam, Marion, Citrus, and Hernando.

¹⁷ Ascension, Franklin, Rapides, St. Helena, St. Landry, and West Carroll.

border and the neighboring counties in Texas are now cut off by white parishes from the chain of parishes and counties running up along the banks of the Mississippi. Even in Arkansas, what was in 1900 the northernmost county¹⁸ of this black belt has now a white majority, although in the state as a whole the negroes have increased during the decade slightly more rapidly than the whites. They today, however, constitute only 28 per cent of the population of the state. On the eastern bank of the Mississippi, Shelby County, Tennessee, as a result of the rapid growth of the white population of Memphis, has now a white majority. There are only two counties¹⁹ in Tennessee in which the negroes are the more numerous. West of the Appalachian Mountains, there is no county north of central Tennessee and mid-Arkansas which has more blacks than whites.

The black belts of Texas have never been important. There were two of them: one, a part of the Red River black belt of Louisiana, itself a mere subdivision of the Mississippi belt; the other, in eastern central Texas extending up from the coast. Four of the counties²⁰ in the latter belt have during the decade changed from black to white. Of the 234 counties of this vast state only eight²¹ have negro majorities. Its immense cotton crop is raised by white labor. The rice parishes of Louisiana are white. Many of the sugar parishes are of the same complexion. As has been shown, in the old tobacco section the whites are steadily gaining on the negroes. Contrary to the impression so general in slavery times, it does not appear that negro labor is necessary to the cultivation of any of the great southern staples.

Even before the abolition of slavery it was becoming evident that in those slave states which were chiefly given over to diversified agriculture as distinguished from the production of staples, slave labor could not hold its own as against the competition of free whites. The Missouri Compromise line of 36° 30' is substantially that which separates Virginia from North Carolina, Kentucky from Tennessee, Missouri from Arkansas. North of it, lie Delaware, Maryland, the Virginias, Kentucky, and Missouri, as well as the District of Columbia, in all of which slavery still existed in 1860. In 1820, the year in which Missouri was admitted

¹⁸ Mississippi.

¹⁹ Fayette and Haywood.

²⁰ Brazoria, Wharton, Grimes, and Matagorda.

²¹ Fort Bend, Gregg, Harrison, Marion, Robertson, San Jacinto, Walker, and Waller.

to the Union, the negroes constituted 35 per cent of the population of this section of the country. When, forty years afterwards, Lincoln was elected, less than one quarter of the inhabitants had negro blood in their veins. Today not one seventh of their population is of African descent. During the last decade the negro population in this part of the country remained almost stationary, its increase being but a trifle over six tenths of one per cent. In Tennessee there were fewer negroes in 1910 than there were in 1900. The change which has taken place in the rural population in some of these states, in the last half century, has been very striking. In the counties of Maryland, outside of Baltimore City and County, there are fewer negroes today than there were in 1860.

To sum up the whole matter—it is possible, though not proven, that there were in 1910 more negroes in the country than the census returned. Even if that be so, it seems certain that the whites are increasing more rapidly than the negroes in the country as a whole and in every portion of the land in which the latter are numerous enough to constitute a numerically important portion of the population.

In the most southerly group of states the whites are increasing much faster than the blacks. This rule holds generally, though not universally, good in even the most overwhelmingly black of the black counties of the black belts. It is applicable both to the rural and to the urban South. While in the far south the negro increase is absolutely considerable, and in the north is both absolutely and relatively large, in the old border slave states lying north of the cotton country the negro population is stationary or decreasing. The movements of population in those sections in which tobacco, cotton, rice, and sugar are the staple crops show that negro labor is no longer necessary to their cultivation.

However, in the country as a whole, persons of African descent are increasing and not decreasing in numbers. We have now ten millions of negro inhabitants. They are, in the New Testament sense, our neighbors. It will not be easy to bring about a working adjustment between the Golden Rule and the deep-seated convictions, instincts, or prejudices of so many American white men. But the problem can be approached free from any apprehension that the darker race will ever be, in any considerable portion of the country, numerically predominant.

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